



New York District Office

# *News Release*

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## ***Small Business Owner Helps Keep Gardeners from Getting Down and Dirty***

**Beacon, NY**— As a gardening professional for 15 years, Harriet Zbikowski would toil in the soil, always somewhat frustrated with the gardening gloves she would be using. The only available gloves over those years were sized to men's hands, bulky, cumbersome and unattractive to boot. Zbikowski would frequently resort to using classic women's fashion gloves from the fifties for a better fit and feel, but they easily wore out. Zbikowski's frustration eventually turned to inspiration and a resultant successful small business--- Foxgloves, Inc.

Zbikowski had left gardening to pursue her master's degree in landscape architecture at Cornell University, moved to Cold Spring and did landscape-design work. After some serendipitous meetings with a New York City fashion designer, the sole remaining glove manufacturer in the city, and Murray Maizner, a Service Corps of Retired Executives counselor who had spent his entire business career in the glove industry, Zbikowski set about creating a glove that gardeners would enjoy wearing.

With their help and her 20-year long file on gloves, Zbikowski designed and manufactured Foxgloves Garden Gloves, using a blend of modern performance fabrics. She started her company in 1999 traveling to local nurseries with which she was familiar. Zbikowski understood the importance of using the Internet and made sure to establish a "storefront" Web address. With her Web site and some savvy marketing through periodicals such as *Country Living*, *House and Garden* and *Sunset* magazines, sales took off. To help grow the company Zbikowsky brought on business partner, Chance O'Connor in 2000. O'Connor's expertise in sales and marketing helped Foxgloves reach a wider audience and fuel growth.

After just one year the partners needed working capital in order to expand. To that end they approached M&T Bank which gave the company a loan guaranteed by the U.S. Small Business Administration. The funds allowed the company to move from Zbikowski's home and purchase a building, acquire inventory, and hire three employees.

Foxgloves' products have become so popular that other companies have entered the market and tried to duplicate the success of the company. But the owners are not too worried as they continue to position their product as the "Gucci" of gardening gloves offering the luxuries of comfort and dexterity without sacrificing protection. And oddly enough, equestrians have discovered that Foxgloves are perfect for riding, opening up a whole new market for the company. In fact, the popularity of the company's products continues to grow and it now exports to Canada, England, Ireland, Denmark, and the Benelux countries.

Foxgloves' partners are in the habit of giving to the community. They have donated their gloves to New York's Central Park Conservancy, urban gardening organizations and Philadelphia's Work-to-Ride Program which gives inner city youths the opportunity to play polo.

Foxgloves' partners offer tips to other aspiring entrepreneurs. "You have to have a strong belief in your product and yourself," said Zbikowski. "And especially, know your market." Partner O'Connor offers, "Be aware there are a lot of free resources out there that can help in virtually any aspect of your business. I'm not sure where we would be if we hadn't taken advantage of them." That's good advice if you want to keep your business from going down and getting dirty.

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